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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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Subject: "QUICK BREADS." Information from home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publication available, Farmers' Bulletin 1775, "Homemade Bread, Cake and Pastry."

You know -- every good housewife knows -- that one good way to make family meals more interesting is to have a variety in bread. And if you haven't time to make your own yeast breads, you can at least make different hot breads which bake in a short time -- muffins of all kinds, biscuits, gems, popovers and all the rest. And you can serve ^{these} hot breads -- or "quick breads" -- in many ways besides on the bread and butter plate. You can use baking powder biscuit dough for the crust of meat or fruit pie, or for fruit or meat shortcake. For dessert you can make pin-wheel rolls, spread with fruit butter, sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar. You can make popovers, split them, and use them as cups and tops for creamed chicken or fish instead of patty shells.

Right now is a good time to try your hand at some different quick breads, because wheat is on the list of foods we have in abundance. In fact, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has suggested that housewives do more home baking to help out local growers who haven't enough room to store their wheat.

The standard biscuit recipe is given in the Department of Agriculture bulletin on home baking. (This free bulletin is called "Homemade Bread, Cake & Pastry." It is No. 1775 and you get your copy by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.)

The standard recipe in this bulletin makes a biscuit with a large volume and a tender flaky crumb, free from yellow or brown specks, if you stir the dough, and then knead it slightly before you roll it. About 18 strokes of kneading is enough. Biscuits brown more evenly and quickly if you bake them on a baking sheet without

sides. The standard ingredients are: Sifted flour, 3 cups....baking powder, 4 teaspoons....salt, 1 teaspoon....fat, 4 to 6 tablespoons....milk enough to make a soft dough--about 1 cup.

Here's how to mix: Sift the dry ingredients together and cut in the fat with a biscuit cutter. Make a well in the center and add the milk slowly, stirring from the center until you get a soft dough. For drop biscuits you just drop the dough by spoonfuls on a baking sheet. But for cut biscuits place the dough on a lightly floured board, and pat out or roll the dough about until $3/4$ inch thick, or knead gently and roll out. Cut into as many biscuits as possible from the first rolling. Handling the dough to roll it for a second cutting tends to make it stiff, and make less tender biscuits. Place the biscuits on a baking sheet and bake in a hot oven (450 degrees Fahrenheit) for about 15 minutes.

If you want to use sour milk instead of sweet, leave out 2 teaspoons of baking powder and add $1/2$ teaspoon of soda to the dry ingredients.

That standard recipe is just the beginning of what you can do with biscuit dough with that recipe as a foundation; you can make a great variety of delicious breads. Try adding half a cup of grated cheese, or half a cup of grated orange rind, or half a cup of chopped nuts to the sifted dry ingredients as you mix them. Or make some peanut butter biscuits. For those you take out half the fat in the recipe, and in place of it use 4 tablespoons of peanut butter. Mix it in when you mix the fat.

Here's a little tip: When you want to put a biscuit crust on a meat pie, add a little extra fat to the dough- possibly some of the fat from the meat in the pie. This gives a particularly good flavor to chicken pies. Cook a meat pie with biscuit crust at slightly lower temperature than you use for plain biscuits-425 degrees Fahrenheit- and have the meat filling hot when you put the crust on.

Another little tip: Shortcake is just about like biscuit dough except that it contains more fat,- half a cup, or 8 tablespoonfuls to 3 cups of sifted flour.

For fruit shortcakes, some cooks add sugar to the dough, but it isn't strictly necessary. Roll the dough about one-fourth inch thick and bake shortcakes double-- that is, with one round on top of the other, separated by buttering the under round, so they'll come apart easily. You can do this with individual shortcakes, or with one large round. Have the oven hot for shortcake - 425 degrees. Try different fruits for shortcake when they are in season -- fresh peaches, stewed plums and apples. All these make good shortcake desserts. And of course any kind of stewed meat or minced meat in gravy or white sauce seems like a new dish if you serve it as "shortcake". That's all there is to chicken shortcake, for example.

Now about muffins: Muffins are made from a softer mixture. Muffin dough is not stiff enough to stand alone, so it is baked in individual muffin pans. And muffins always contain egg. Many cooks prefer old-fashioned iron muffin pans to other kinds because they hold the heat well. You can also cook muffins in glass baking cups.

The important point in making muffins is not to stir them too much. Mix the ingredients together just enough to moisten them. If you mix them too much they will be tough and coarse-grained, and have tunnels inside and peaks or knobs on the outside. Home economists explain the reason-- stirring too much overdevelops the elastic quality of the gluten in the flour. Well the standard recipe for muffins is in that Department of Agriculture bulletin too. And with that standard recipe as a foundation you can make many different kinds of muffins - muffins with nuts, muffins with fruit, muffins with bits of bacon, muffins with different flours like oatmeal and corn meal.

And once again that home baking bulletin is free from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. while the free supply lasts.

